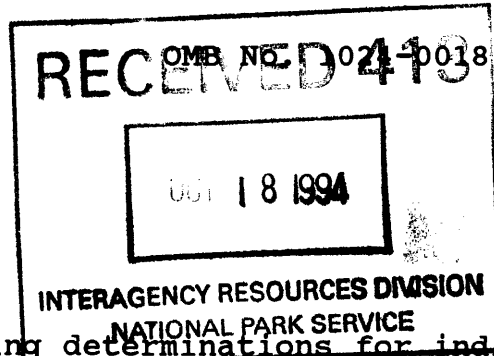


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name The Manhattan Laundry

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 1326 - 1346 Florida Avenue, N.W. not for publication N/A
city or town Washington vicinity X
state District of Columbia code DC zip code 20009 county N/A code N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally X statewide locally.

(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Robert L. Mallett
Signature of certifying official

10/7/94
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register
(See continuation sheet).
☐ determined eligible for the
National Register
(See continuation sheet).
☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register
☐ removed from the National Register

☐ other (explain): _____

Entered in the
National Register

Edson H. Beall
Signature of Keeper

11-21-94
Date
of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>3</u>	☐ buildings
☐	☐ sites
☐	☐ structures
☐	☐ objects
☐	☐ Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>TRANSPORTATION</u>	Sub: <u>rail-related</u>
<u>INDUSTRY</u>	<u>communications facility</u>
<u>COMMERCE/TRADE</u>	<u>specialty store</u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>SOCIAL</u>	Sub: <u>civic</u>
<u>COMMERCE</u>	<u>specialty store</u>
<u>VACANT/NOT IN USE</u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

<u>LATE VICTORIAN</u>
<u>Other: Industrial Vernacular</u>
<u>MODERN MOVEMENT</u>
<u>Art Deco</u>

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	<u>STONE</u>
	<u>CONCRETE</u>
roof	<u>METAL: Tin</u>
	<u>OTHER: Slag</u>
walls	<u>BRICK</u>
other	<u>Porcelain Enamel Panels</u>
	<u>Glassblock</u>

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

TRANSPORTATION

Period of Significance 1877-1940

Significant Dates 1877

1893

1903

Alexander M. Pringle

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.) The boundary includes all buildings historically associated with the Manhattan Laundry.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Eve Lydia Barsoum / Architectural Historian
organization D.C. Historic Preservation Division date September 13, 1994
street & number 614 H Street, N.W. telephone (202) 727-7360
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20001

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name The Manhattan Laundry, Ltd.
street & number 1348 Florida Avenue telephone _____
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20009

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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OMB No. 1024-0018
RECEIVED 413
JUN 18 1994
INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
~~The Manhattan Laundry~~
Name of Property
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County and State

The Manhattan Laundry at 1326-1346 Florida Avenue, N.W. is comprised of three buildings connected by two enclosed bridges at the second floor level. The two main buildings face north on Florida Avenue. The third structure faces the alley behind 1326 Florida Avenue. The significant architectural character of this group of buildings is defined by the front facades of the two major buildings. Additions, alterations and damage have affected the integrity of the secondary facades, lessening their limited original significance. The alley building is something of an architectural curiosity and it contributes little to the architectural quality of the group. The buildings present the vernacular industrial style, but the principle facade of the main building is in the Art Deco style.

The older west building, 1346 Florida Avenue, N.W., was constructed in 1877. It is a two-story, six-bay brick building that is essentially rectangular in shape. Only the front facade is detailed. The brick is common red brick laid in common bond. Although the first-floor window openings are presently boarded up, the abstract, somewhat Palladian configuration of the openings within the second and fifth bays can still be seen. There are entrances in the second bay and sixth bay of this facade. The existing opening in the sixth bay is not original to the building. The rectangular second-floor openings display paired twenty-light metal windows with six-light pivot sash at the center. A brick parapet tops the metal cornice above the second floor. The parapet forms a stepped pediment over the eastern half of the front facade. A fifteen-light window has been inserted at the center of the stepped pediment. Openings on the secondary facades are varied in appearance and pattern. Some appear to be the original nineteenth-century openings, others are clearly twentieth-century openings. Brick sills and shallow brick arches frame metal sash windows. Many of the openings are presently boarded over and many of the sashes are missing. Considerable alteration has occurred on all secondary facades. The building has suffered from neglect and parts of it are in extremely poor condition. The northwest corner of the building, adjacent to the alley, has been partially knocked away by vehicles using the alley. One of the additions on the rear of the building was built of soft sandy yellow brick that has seriously deteriorated. The building needs major repointing and brick repair, as well as work to repair structural deterioration; crudely-installed tie rods appear in numerous locations on the exterior of the building.

The interior of this building is in seriously deteriorated condition and contains no significant architectural features. The spaces are large utilitarian industrial spaces, altered over the years to serve a variety of uses.

The one-story brick bridge connecting the building to 1326 Florida Avenue runs east-west and is located approximately 100 feet from the street. There are three eight-light pivot windows on the north and south walls of the bridge.

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The east building is a two-story L-shape structure continuing back from a three-story frontispiece that displays the important primary facade. The long wing of the "L" extends along an alley that runs parallel to Florida Avenue. The short portion of the ell connects with the bridge and faces the east wall of the building. The front facade of the building, which faces north onto Florida Avenue, is the tip of the short leg of the ell. The symmetrical three-story front facade is articulated in enameled metal panels and glass block. This highly-stylized flat facade returns a short distance on either side of the building. Classic volumetric architectural vocabulary is rendered in two-dimensional form and traditional, highly plastic ornament is reduced to its linear equivalent. Six slender green bands extending around the white panels at the first floor level make the lower portion of the facades read as a rusticated base. At either end of the building and at the southern edges of the returns, the white panels of the base extend upward to the white panel cornice. This detail serves as visual reinforcement at the corners of the building, harking back to the heavy corner piers in post and beam construction. The cornice is articulated by three green bands interrupted by red diamonds. Above the first story, second and third stories of the front facade are composed of the square glass block and are framed by the enamelled-metal panel facade.

The entrance to the building is at the center of the first story and is framed by a green and yellow Greek key and stylized egg and dart surround. The first floor windows, three to either side of the entrance, are set within the green bands that extend around the base of the buildings. The sides of the openings are outlined with vertical green bands to create a subtle framing device. Original windows, now gone, consisted of single pane glass below transoms. The second and third floor windows are floated within the glass block wall. The slender rectangular second floor casement windows are centered within a white enamelled panel architrave. There is a glass spandrel panel below the casement and a metal transom panel embellished with a water lily above it. In these decorative panels the color palette expands to include orange, pink, blue, and deep violet. The three-light horizontal pivot windows on the third floor are also outlined with white panels. This facade was restored to its original appearance during a 1990-1991 rehabilitation project.

The secondary facades of the building are industrial in character. The concrete frame is exposed and infilled with brick. Multiple light industrial sash windows stretch across the length of each structural bay on the second floor. Metal roll-up garage doors occupy the openings in the bays on the first floor of the west wall and the rear wall. The south facade, constructed of brick, appears to be a later addition.

The interior of this building is generally unarticulated open industrial space with no distinguishing architectural features. Parts of the building are in very poor condition and serious damage occurred in 1978, when there was a fire in the building. However, amazingly, the offices in the front of the building remain

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intact. These spaces, constructed of glass block, were somewhat sensational in their day and they remain the only significant feature in the interior of the building. Although in damaged condition, they can be repaired.

A small enclosed brick bridge connects the southern portion of the east building with a small two-story ancillary brick building to the south. This irregular brick garage/warehouse structure is a small portion of the complex. It has been altered over the years and its interior, never significant, is even less so now.

These three buildings form what is known as the Manhattan Laundry. The two main buildings illustrate the evolution of architectural styles in Washington and form an important visual record. The enamelled metal panel facade of 1326 Florida Avenue, N.W., is a significant architectural monument in the city. The character and architectural significance of the complex is primarily expressed by the front facades of the two main buildings, and those portions of the buildings have been restored.

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The buildings which comprise the Manhattan Laundry were constructed over several decades. The earliest buildings were erected between 1877 and 1880. These parts of the Manhattan Laundry are typical of vernacular industrial structures built during the late-nineteenth century and are important to Washington for their display of industrial building practices of that time in a city where industrial buildings are historically small in number. The brick load-bearing walls laid in common bond and segmental arch windows with double-hung sashes are characteristic of the utilitarian structures built to serve a number of functions.

The Manhattan Laundry building at 1346 Florida Avenue, N.W. originally served as a traction facility for the Washington and Georgetown Railroad Company. The building was constructed of brick, approximately 65 feet by 125 feet, with a gable roof covered with tin and a hoistway protected by an iron railing. John B. Brady, an architect who worked extensively for local street railway companies, designed a two-story car barn for the site in 1877. Little is known about John B. Brady, aside from his extensive work for the local street rail companies. His office was in several locations in the southwest section of the city from the mid-1870s to the 1890s. Brady designed a number of commercial structures, including the distinguished Metropolitan Railroad Company car barn, which stood at P and 4th Streets, SW from 1892 to 1962. It was designed in the Romanesque Revival style and had a tower. Brady was not a member of any of the local architects' and builders' associations.

The Washington and Georgetown Railroad Company acquired a number of other lots in Square 234. In 1878, the company built a blacksmith shop on Lot 15. Around 1880, a second large car barn was added on the south side of the east-west alley that divided the square, and a third stable was erected on lots 103 and 104 fronting on W Street.² In 1892, the Washington and Georgetown Railroad sold its buildings to the Brodix Publishing Company.

In 1893, Brodix converted the facilities to a printing plant with plans developed by architect Thomas J. Francis, Jr.³ In 1898, John Sherman, former Secretary of State under William McKinley, acquired the buildings to which he made additional renovations. The two large car doors on the front of the building were bricked

¹ D.C. Permit Build #868, September 7, 1877.

² D.C. Permit to Build #973, July 30, 1878.

³ D.C. Permit to Build #2273, May 8, 1893.

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up, as well as part of the larger rear door to the alley, and several new windows were added to the structure. In 1900, floor joists and floor boards were replaced and four new windows were cut into the walls.⁴ In 1905, the Manhattan Laundry began renting the building. Alterations were made to accommodate the laundry machines. In 1906, an 84-horsepower boiler was installed, in "addition to the two now set," and the second story floor joists above the boiler were "covered with a metal ceiling" as a precaution against fire.⁵ Over the next three decades, the laundry facility expanded into several of the neighboring residential and commercial buildings and also constructed new buildings to meet the business' needs.

The principal figure in the firm at this time was James H. Ellsworth, the company's treasurer. He conducted the first major expansion of the Manhattan Laundry by acquiring lot 146, on the north side of the mid-block alley and several hundred feet east of the rear of the laundry buildings. In early 1908, the architectural firm of Poynton and Wester designed a brick stable and wagon house for the site. The Part of the \$4,000 structure was two stories, and part one story. Later in 1908, lots 82 and 83, immediately adjacent to the southeast corner of the building at 1346 Florida Avenue, were combined as lot 146 and a one-story brick structure, approximately 45 feet by 35 feet and 21 feet height, was built for the Manhattan Laundry steam plant (boiler room). The cost of the improvement was \$2,500. Later on, probably during World War I, a second story with a floor of concrete on concrete-filled I-beams and a roof of tin, was added to the boiler house to accommodate the expanded equipment needed for the growing business. In 1923, the steam plant was again extended (to the north, onto lot 84) and the building was raised to three stories at a total cost of \$10,000. The door to the boiler and engine house was widened to permit installation of a larger boiler.

Lots 85 through 90 on the west side of Liberty Street (renamed Brown's Court) were purchased for the third expansion of the Manhattan Laundry in 1926. The small houses on the site were razed in November and the next month work started on a two-story, brick addition occupying the entire cleared area. The structural system consisted of brick piers and concrete floors and the building was heated by steam. At this time, the Florida Avenue front of the laundry was unified by

⁴ D.C. Permit to Build #746, November 4, 1898. D.C. Permit to Build #1873, June 21, 1900.

⁵ Application for Permit to Set Boilers and Engines #1782, December 29, 1905.

⁶ D.C. Permit to Build #1964, December 19, 1907; #761, August 21, 1908; #2842, September 19, 1923.

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a continuous facade punctuated by utilitarian casement windows. The fascinating original railroad company building was altered by the installation of characteristically 1920s commercial windows. The cost of expansion was \$26,500; A.S.J. Atkinson was the architect and Walter Case was the builder. The new facade and that of the 1346 Florida Avenue was painted from the outset. The final and major enlargement of the Manhattan Laundry operation on Florida Avenue, N.W., took place over a period of approximately ^{two}/_{ow} years, beginning in December 1935. On the east side of Brown's Court the company had acquired lots 99 and 100 by 1920 (as well as lot 146, where the wagon house and stable had been built in 1908.) By early 1936, the entire east side of Brown's Court -- as well as 1326 Florida Avenue and the alley lots on either side of the wagon house -- had been purchased bringing the land area of the Manhattan Laundry to its current size.

The large L-shape parcel east of Brown's Court was redeveloped by the laundry in three sections, from east to west. Beginning in January 1936, a three-story section of the wagon house immediately adjacent, on part of lot 146. The following May, the one-story section of the 1908 wagon house were razed. In June, construction of a two-story building, approximately 76 feet by 65 feet, with a garage on the first floor and dry-cleaning facilities on the second, was begun on that site.

The designer/builder of these alley additions to the laundry plant was Alexander M. Pringle (1886-1968), whose offices at the time were at 907 15th Street, N.W. Pringle was a native of Anoka, Minnesota and a graduate of the Carnegie Institute of Technology (1917). Pringle came to Washington at the end of World War I, worked first as a draftsman, and for a time operated a restaurant at 300 I Street. In 1927, he founded his own construction company, which he ran for thirty-five years. Pringle specialized in heavy-duty commercial and industrial building, and his varied experience led to a responsible position as an industrial analyst with the War Production Board, 1942-1946.

Pringle was also the contractor for the building of the new administrative offices of the Manhattan Laundry Company, which comprised the third phase of the construction project and had a highly visible facade on Florida Avenue. However, Pringle was not chosen to design this part of the building. The design of this prominent statement of the Manhattan Laundry's facility was entrusted to Bedford Brown, IV, an architect in Arlington, Virginia.

⁷ D.C. Permit to Build #4962, November 19, 1926.

⁸ D.C. Permit to Build #187673, December 30, 1935; #192529, May 28, 1936.

⁹ "Alexander Pringle, Founder of D.C. Building Firm." *The Washington Star*, September 10, 1968.

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Brown had an extensive association with the city of Washington. He was the great-grandson of Bedford Brown, the senator from North Carolina. He was also the son of Glenn Brown, the architect who was Secretary Treasurer of the American Institute of Architects from 1899 to 1913. Glenn Brown was also a historian with regard to Washington, D.C. and an architectural historian with regard to the U.S. Capitol building. Moreover, he was instrumental in the formation of the McMillan Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts.

Bedford Brown IV was born in Alexandria, Virginia in 1881. In 1902, he was appointed to the post of junior architectural draftsman by James Knox Taylor, Supervising Architect of the Treasury. However, he resigned in September to attend the Columbia University School of Architecture. In 1906, Bedford Brown resumed work for Taylor in the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury at 1,200 per annum. He resigned in June, 1907, to go into architectural practice with his father -- a partnership which lasted until 1921. Bedford Brown also taught during these years at the George Washington University school of Architecture.¹⁰

Glenn Brown and Bedford Brown, IV worked almost exclusively in the eclectic Beaux-Arts classicism of the early-twentieth century, creating such beautiful structures as the Beale House, now the Embassy of Egypt, at 2301 Massachusetts Avenue, 1907-1908, and Dumbarton Bridge over Rock Creek at Q Street, N.W. (colloquially known as the Buffalo Bridge), 1914-1915. Their practice also produced a number of commercial structures, such as an addition to Kann's Department store, on Pennsylvania Avenue near 8th Street, 1908. In his plans and elevations for the offices of the Manhattan Laundry, Bedford Brown departed from his penchant for classicism to create a building which both reflected the popular Art Deco style of the 1930s and was particularly suited to the message desired by the owners of a modern laundry: light, clean, and efficient.

The irregularly-shaped building occupies all of lots 91-100 on the east side of Brown's Court and the adjacent Florida Avenue lot 128. Construction of a two-story building costing 450,000 was to begin in late 1936, but in March 1937, the decision was made to add a third story at an additional cost of \$6,300.¹¹ The edifice that resulted is a concrete structure whose Florida Avenue facade is a tightly-controlled, highly-imaginative combination of vividly-colored enameled metal panels and glass block walls interrupted regularly by operable windows. The main doorway is surrounded by a green and yellow Greek-key motif and on the second story whimsical detailing is carried further by panels decorated with water lilies over the windows. The company signs mounted on the facade are totally in keeping

¹⁰ Files of Dr. Antoinette J. Lee, Historian, History of the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury Project, Columbia Historical Society; telephone interview, 13 February 1986, with William Bushong, Ph.D. candidate, George Washington University, who is writing a dissertation on Glenn Brown.

¹¹ D.C. Permit to Build #197259, October 13, 1936; #200153, March 10, 1937.

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with the high style graphics of the era. The structure is a startling visual departure from the predominant red brick of the surrounding neighborhood.

Brown and the owners of the Manhattan Laundry were obviously aware of contemporary trends in the laundry plants, calling attention in particular to cantilevered concrete buildings where there could be almost continuous walls of glass and glass block, admitting maximum amounts of light and bringing cheer to the interior of an intrinsically-routine, labor-intensive business (administrative office uses were almost entirely on the third floor and the lower levels were part of the laundry-plant operation.¹² Moreover, *Pencil Points* in September 1935, included a thirty-five page technical supplement on glass-block building, prepared by Owens-Illinois, proclaiming that the "brochure presents a complete treatment of Glass Masonry to the architectural profession for the first time."¹³

The Washington Herald wrote about the enlarged Manhattan Laundry Company in an article in its issue of December 13, 1937, saying that the modernization program had "placed this company in the forefront of this industry. Describing the building designed by Bedford Brown, the writer continued,

Modernistic in its architectural style, this new structure makes free use of glass block for both exterior walls and partitions. Floors are of rubber tile, ceilings of acoustical tile, and paneling has been carried out with a flexible wood, in walnut, that is applied like wallpaper. A modern winter air conditioning system with provision for conversion to include summer cooling, was embodied in the administration building.

Taken together, the Manhattan Laundry offers a unique opportunity to view a variety of architectural styles spanning a 50-year period in Washington's history. From the earliest building originally constructed as a car barn, to the Art Deco industrial structure of the 1930s and the vernacular buildings acquired or construction in between, the Manhattan Laundry stands as an important marker of the city's architectural heritage.

The buildings and events associated with the Manhattan Laundry are also significant because they provide information important in the history of the City of Washington. The evolution of the complex from a car barn/transportation facility to what became the largest laundry company in the city exemplifies the economic, social, and historical heritage of the District of Columbia.

¹² See, for example: "Planning for Laundry Efficiency," *Architectural Record*, Vol 72, No. 4 (October 1932): 252-258. "The Knickerbocker Laundry Company Plant," *Architectural Record*, Vol. 72, No. 6 (December 1932): 381-387.

¹³ *Pencil Points*, Vol XVI, No. 9 (September 1935).

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The Washington and Georgetown Railroad Company, the original owner of these buildings, was one of the earliest public transportation companies in Washington. Chartered by Congress on May 17, 1862, the Company was born under the emergency conditions of the Civil War and yielded right-of-way to the federal government for use of the road and its cars for government freight. The traction system consisted of three lines: Georgetown to the Navy Yard, the Potomac River to Boundary Street at 7th Street, NW, and along 14th Street from Boundary Street to New York Avenue. The 7th and 14th Street lines were to be completed within six months of the charter and in November 1862 horse cars began to run on 14th Street from New York Avenue to Boundary Street.

In need of suitable facilities for its equipment and horses, the Washington and Georgetown Railroad selected lots in Square 234 for a car barn and stables. In 1877, these first buildings were constructed for the street line company and by 1880, a blacksmith shop, a second car barn and additional stable were added to the site.

By the 1880s the horse drawn cars of the system had become outdated, and Congress ordered the traction company to replace the cars with mechanically-operated vehicles in 1889. By August 1892, the Washington and Georgetown Railroad successfully converted the 14th Street line to cable, with the line extended north into the growing suburban areas. A car barn was built for the system's new equipment at Park Road in Mt. Pleasant, and the Square 234 in December of that year.

The Brodix Publishing Company, the new owner of the buildings, was responsible for transforming the site into a printing plant, a function it served for over ten years. In May 1893, the company spent \$5,000 to convert the buildings to this new use according to plans designed by architect Thomas J. Francis, Jr.¹⁴ Brodix operated from this site for the next five years publishing various commercial registers and business journals.

In 1898, John Sherman, a leading Republican representative from Ohio and Secretary of State in the McKinley Administration, purchased the printing plant from Brodix. After a long distinguished career of public service, Sherman retired to pursue several investment opportunities in the Capitol Heights region of Washington with his brother, William Tecumseh Sherman. The Shermans speculated in numerous real estate ventures and the publishing house at 13th Street and Florida Avenue was but one of their business enterprises. At the printing plant, the Shermans published *The Home Magazine*. The publication ended abruptly, however, when Sherman died in 1900. Although Sherman operated from this site only for two years, his association with the Manhattan Laundry building is nevertheless significant. Sherman was a leading political figure on Capitol Hill in the late-nineteenth century and was responsible for the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, legislation which

¹⁴ D.C. Permit to Build #2273, May 8, 1893.

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instituted sweeping changes in the organizational practices of big business and that are still in effect in some form today. Sherman's association with the Manhattan Laundry further increases the significance of the site and provides us an opportunity to study Sherman's transition from public to private life.

Five years after Sherman's death, the buildings were refitted for yet another industry. The Manhattan Laundry began renting the space in 1905, marking the beginning of a long, success run in Washington as one of the few laundry businesses in the area. The Manhattan Laundry Company was apparently established in Jersey City, New Jersey in 1902, and relocated in Washington in 1905.¹⁵ The principal figure in the company at this time was the treasurer, James H. Ellsworth. He was responsible for the first major expansion of the Manhattan Laundry at Lot 146 on the north side of the mid-block alley and several hundred feet east of the rear of the laundry building. In early 1908, the architectural firm of Poynton and Webster designed a brick stable and wagon house for the Laundry to be built on this site. By 1909, a steam plant had been added at Lot 146.

During the first several decades of the twentieth century, Washington was a recognized leader in the laundry industry, and the Manhattan Laundry was a particularly attractive business venture. Dr. John Lowe, a partner in a Baltimore laundry chain, seized the opportunity to enter Washington's laundry market and acquired Manhattan Laundry in 1915. Lowe and his son, John, Jr., ran the Washington company until 1973, and under their management the Manhattan Laundry grew into the city's largest laundry.

By the early 1930s, the Manhattan Laundry company had a fleet of forty-five trucks operating over thirty-three delivery routes. The company did the largest volume of any local laundry business and had already outgrown its facilities. Despite the inherent, negative aspect of laundry work, management-labor relations were good throughout the Depression era, and the company was spared the strikes that hit a number of other Washington laundries. The Manhattan Company was something of a model for equipment and employment-practice innovations in this regard.¹⁶ Additionally, the laundry company proved to be an anchor for the surrounding black neighborhoods, providing jobs for many local residents. The Manhattan Laundry reaffirmed its role in the black community when it became the first black-operated laundry in Washington in 1973.

¹⁵ The exact origin of the company is unclear. Several contemporary professional laundry business journals, such as the Starchroom Laundry Journal, mention that a representative of the Manhattan Laundry Co. of Jersey City visited Washington in late 1905 to discuss a business merger.

¹⁶ "Manhattan Laundry Completes Expansion," op. cit.; E.F. Wesely (Vice President of the Manhattan Laundry Company), "Laundry Service is a Luxury," National Laundry Journal, Vol. 57, No. 10 (November 1936): 458-459.

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The Manhattan Laundry is also significant to the city of Washington as an illustration of the course of urban development of the nation's capital. As part of L'Enfant's original plan for the District of Columbia, Square 234 logs the development of Washington's northern sector.

Square 234 is located along the District of Columbia's original northwest border at Florida Avenue, formerly known as Boundary Street. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the area was largely undeveloped, with Washington's more populous centers falling along Pennsylvania Avenue. The post-Civil War population boom, however, pushed development northward and some residential rowhouses began to appear in the vicinity of the Manhattan Laundry site. The area proved to be a difficult route of travel, however, and as the outer edge of the city's center, it primarily attracted lumber yards, tanneries, dumps, and light manufacturing.

When public transportation routes were formulated for the city, the area was chosen as the northern terminus for the Washington and Georgetown railroad Company whose line ran along 14th Street between New York Avenue and Boundary Street. In 1877, lots in Square 234 were secured by the traction company for the site of the new car barn.

As the area became more accessible through the transportation lines, residential and commercial structures began to appear in the area in increasing numbers. Numerous two- and three-story brick houses were constructed in Square 234 and the Washington and Georgetown Railroad increased the number of light industrial buildings through construction of a blacksmith shop, stables, and car barns. The Manhattan Laundry, which arrived in Washington in 1905, continued the growth of industrial buildings when it constructed steam plants and garages.

Business use of Square 234 and nearby areas and nearby areas intensified over the next several decades when the former houses facing 14th Street were converted to retail establishments. Next to the Manhattan Laundry headquarters on Florida Avenue at 14th Street, a large gas station opened in 1928. A few small, working-class apartment houses had been built in the early-twentieth-century on both 13th and 14th Streets, and the 14th Street commercial district served the city at large, as well as the adjacent middle-class neighborhoods of Columbia Heights and 16th Street. The 14th Street line of the Capital Traction Company remained one of the more heavily traveled in the city.

Today the area is dominated by rowhouses, with occasional large commercial and light industrial buildings lining the streets, as well. While many of the buildings are in need of repair, the neighborhood is nevertheless intact and provides a visual record of Washington's development.

The Manhattan Laundry complex, in particular, serve as a tangible reminder of Washington's history. From these buildings we learn of the city's early transportation system and the type of facilities required to serve the traction

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companies. Additionally, the buildings provide an opportunity to learn about one of the more prominent political figures of his day, John Sherman, and his transition from public to private life. Finally, the buildings tell a story of a successful business industry, the Manhattan Laundry, which helped make Washington a leader in the field.

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Antoinette J. Lee, Project Director
Research Files

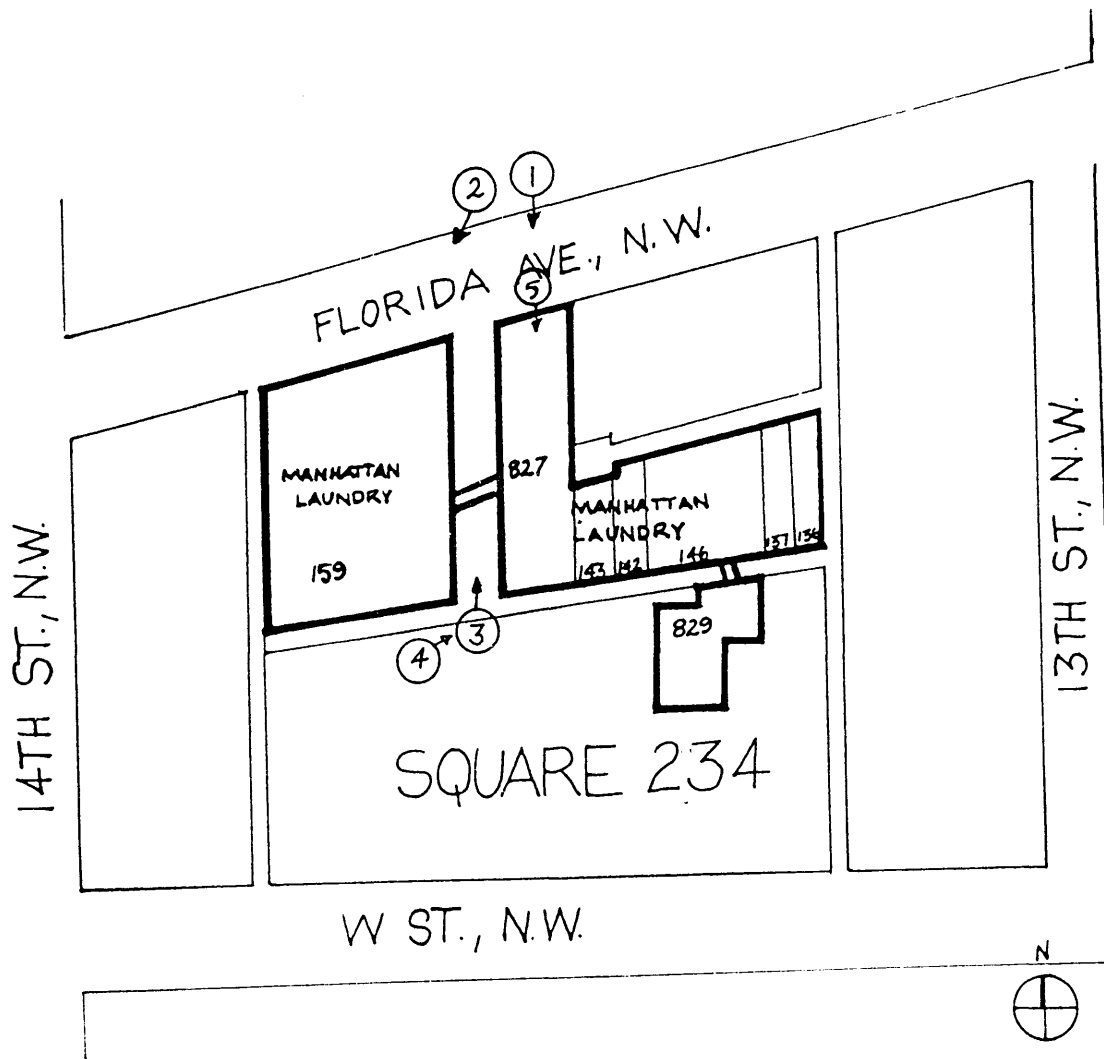
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THE MANHATTAN LAUNDRY

ADDRESS: 1326-1346 Florida Ave., N.W.
SQUARE: 234
LOTS: 159, 827, 143, 142, 146, 136, 137, 829
SQ. FOOTAGE: WEST BUILDING = 15,616 sq. ft.
EAST BUILDING = 15,029 sq. ft.
SOUTH BUILDING = 4,798 sq. ft.

